1: Obermeyer E-5 (1964-1965) 1969 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
'Aishaibat

CHAPTER II

THE ECOLOGY AND ECONOMY OF THE AL-QASR AREA

Changing Patterns of Land Use

131 Al-Qasr is located in the Northwestern Coastal Zone, a relatively fertile littoral region forming the northern edge of the Egyptian Western Desert. Extending from Alexandria to Sallum on the Libyan border, the Zone is some 500 kilometers in length and reaches south into the desert some 20 to 50 134 kilometers. A deep soil deposit and a relatively high average 132 rainfall of about 15 centimeters (20 centimeters of rain would 241 be considered "high") permit limited agriculture in this region.

133 Due to the drainage pattern of the coastal area there is a fair supply of underground water. The rain percolates [172] down through coastal sand dunes and is trapped in man-made underground galleries dating from Roman times. Farther into 312 the desert, cisterns, which also date from Roman times, catch the rains draining off the Libyan plateau to the south. This plateau and the catchment area form the southern boundary of the greater al-Qasr settlement area (see Figure 4). The General Desert Development Authority, an agency of the government, estimates that there are about 3,000 of these

(literally, sky-wells, to indicate that they are dug to receive and preserve rain water). Most of these are ancient Roman pools which were claimed either by the government or by individuals, and are put into use again to store rain water. Recently, the government has erected a number of dams to preserve the rain water in exceptionally good years from flowing into the sea. All this, however, is not enough to provide the tribal population in the area with a permanent supply of water because of the limited capacity of the cisterns and the pools and the scarcity of rain and its erratic nature. Recent attempts have been made to tap the underground water in some parts of the area. A large number of wells were sunk, especially along the coast.

The economy of Awlad Ali is based on livestock husbandry, supplemented by occasional cultivation of barley. Owing largely to the variation in the amount of rainfall, the sources of food in the area have the important characteristic that the place and amount of their occurrence vary from one year to the next. Throughout most of the area, the tribal populations are concerned predominantly with warding off shortages in the food supply by moving with their flocks to areas where grazing lands are available.

Awlad Ali keep a variety of domestic animals, the most important of which, from the economic point of view, are sheep and goats. The economy of Awlad Ali is based on the utilization of the products of these two animals. These products are milk, meat, wool, and hides. Milk and its products constitute the basic element of the people's diet. Milk is never consumed fresh. It is always made into sour milk (maleh), kishk (dried milk), or butter.

3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

the steep sides of which make east–west journeys slow and arduous. To the west this broken country levels down, and in a bay in the hills lies the extensive treeless, but very fertile, basin of al-Marj, known to Europeans as the Barce Plain. It was colonized in classical times and again recently by the Italians. The Arabs call this first terrace *lusaita* (*al-wasaita*), the middle part, because it lies between the coastal plain and the plateau tableland formed by *al-zahir*, the second terrace. This tableland is famous for its Graeco-Roman ruins and is dotted also with the deserted farms of Italian colonists. It mounts to a narrow third terrace, at about 875 metres above sea level, from the top of which one can look down on these settlements.

The plateau slopes southwards through a juniper belt. There forest ends and it continues to roll to the southern steppe in stony undulations dissected by many wadis. In the plain at its foot there is plenty of grass and low scrub, and vegetation is thick in depressions, but the country becomes increasingly desolate the farther to the south one journeys towards the lifeless wastes of the Sahara. The eastern part of Cyrenaica is more arid than the west or centre. The Marmarica, the *batnan* of the Arabs, is characterized by low hills rising from the coastal belt and prolonged towards the south to create a succession of crests of several kilometres in depth. The mean annual rainfall is low and wells are restricted to the coastal belt. However, there is, probably in most years, a certain amount of grazing to some fifty miles from the coast during the rains. The Sirtica, the extension of Cyrenaica to the west, is a vast rolling treeless plain traversed by a series of wadis running north–south which in their spread provide most of the summer grazing. Wells are found only near the coast but pasturage is plentiful till the Wadi al-Farigh is reached.

The rainfall very exactly determines the vegetation belts and thereby limits human distribution and imposes a certain way of life. The amount of precipitation depends on a number of circumstances. Mean annual rainfall decreases from west to east. Altitude also affects it. More significant, however, are the variation with latitude, the seasonal rhythm, and annual irregularities. The accompanying map shows how rainfall decreases rapidly from the coast, how only the very limited plateau area is subject to heavy precipitations (400–550 mms.),

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3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
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tribe. In the oasis of Jalu, where there was not the same tribal solidarity as in the neighbouring oases of Aujila and al-Jikharra, the two lodges were almost next door to each other. This was because the oasis was split into two opposed villages, each occupying about half of it with a strip of waste ground in between. A similar lack of unity in the Egyptian oasis of Siwa accounts for the building of several Sanusiya lodges there.

IV

Starting from the foundation of al-Zawiya al-Baida in 1843 the Order spread itself throughout Cyrenaica until it embraced in its network of lodges the entire tribal system of the country. It seeded itself, as it were, in the crevasses between tribes and between tribal sections, and its points of growth were thus also the points of convergence in tribal and lineage structure.

A tribal zawiya seems generally to have been founded in the following manner. A tribe or tribal section saw with envy that a neighbouring tribe or section had a zawiya. They sent a deputation to the Head of the Order and asked him for a Shaikh to teach their children, cater for their religious needs, settle their disputes, and so forth. The Head of the Order granted them their request and sent them a Shaikh chosen from among the learned and pious men who surrounded him at Jaghbub. The Shaikh probably took with him one or two companions, *Ikhwan*, Brothers of the Order, to help him start the new lodge which the tribesmen built in the most favoured spot in their territory. Simple structures though these zawiyas were, they took many years to complete, being added to when further accommodation was required, in the leisurely Arab way. Most of them were built on Graeco-Roman foundations so that the tribesmen who constructed them found stone ready to hand.

Through the kindness of Shaikh Muhammad al-Tayyib al-Ashhab I have seen the letter sent in 1855 by al-Sayyid Muhammad Ibn 'Ali al-Sanusi al-Khattabi al-Hasani al-Idrisi to his virtuous sons, some of the Shaikhs of the Sdaidi section of the 'Awaqir tribe, about the building of the zawiya of Msus. He says that he is sending to them Brothers to construct the buildings and that he has instructed them to build an annex which he can use as a resthouse when he visits the zawiya, though this